

Sea Turtle Tours

Tours are given on Thursdays by advanced appointment only (no weekend tours). Call 409-766-3500 for details. For information on our annual Open House visit our website at:

<http://www.galvestonlab.sefsc.noaa.gov/>



National Marine Fisheries Service
Galveston Laboratory
4700 Avenue U
Galveston, TX 77551
409-766-3500

U.S. Department of Commerce | National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration
NOAA Fisheries

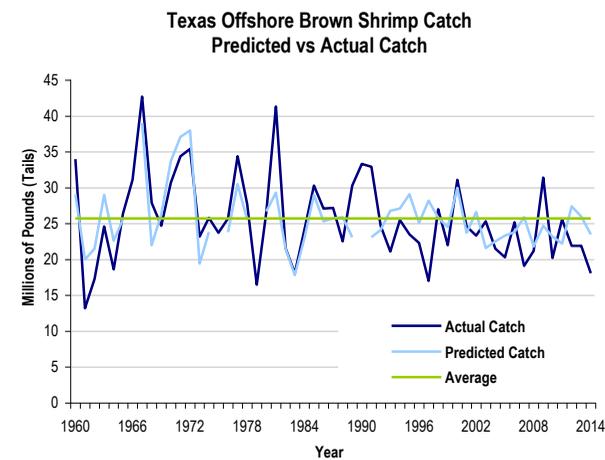
NOAA National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS) Laboratory at Galveston provides scientific information for the management of commercial and recreational shellfish and finfish, conservation of coastal habitats, and protection of threatened and endangered species of the Gulf of Mexico and the U.S. Caribbean. Fishery programs monitor commercial and recreational fishery yields and investigate reproduction, growth, survival, feeding, habitat use, and migrations of shrimp, crab, conch and fish species. Protected species research is devoted to similar ecological studies on sea turtles in addition to investigations on physiology, behavior, strandings, and rehabilitation.



The Galveston Laboratory began in 1929 as a Bureau of Commercial Fisheries facility to study oysters. The present laboratory was established in 1950 on the site of the U.S. Army's Fort Crockett. The laboratory has over 70 employees, occupies more than 55,000 square feet of research space, and has an annual budget of 7-9 million dollars. A 150,000-gallon, natural seawater holding and delivery system supplies aquaria, raceways, and tanks, for research on marine animals. Laboratory staff conducts cooperative research and educational programs with Texas A&M University, the University of Southwestern Louisiana, the University of Texas, Louisiana State University, Savannah State University, the University of Puerto Rico, and Texas Tech University.

These programs provide scientific and technical information for management of commercial and recreational fisheries, essential fisheries habitats, and protected species in the Gulf of Mexico, U.S. Atlantic, and the U.S. Caribbean.

Research at the laboratory has been supported by the Department of Energy, the Army Corps of Engineers, the Minerals Management Service, and the Environmental Protection Agency through cooperative interagency agreements to study human effects on living marine resources. The laboratory's research staff also shares its expertise through teaching and advising undergraduate and graduate students. Numerous Master and Doctoral degrees have been earned under the guidance of staff scientists.



Fishery Management Branch

Since 1960, information on shrimp fishery landings in the Gulf of Mexico has been collected by port agents and state trip ticket systems, and stored at the Galveston Laboratory. Data on the number of vessels, hours fished, and pounds of shrimp landed is used to manage the shrimp fishery in cooperation with the Gulf of Mexico Fishery Management Council and the Gulf coast states. Each June, the laboratory issues a forecast of brown shrimp catch for the coming year.

Since 1960, the laboratory's predicted yield of brown shrimp has been within three percent of the actual catch. Such information allows the fishing industry to prepare their fishing operations for good, poor, or average years.

Since the early 2000's, the laboratory has cooperatively used an electronic logbook system (ELB) to monitor and collect shrimp trawling effort in the Gulf of Mexico. In 2013, we developed a cellular ELB (cELB) that allows the effort data from the offshore shrimp fleet to be downloaded to NMFS servers at the end of each trip. This new system is more cost-effective and efficient since the data can be automatically downloaded instead of manually collected by hired technicians.

The laboratory also monitors the pink shrimp fishery in Florida. The linkage between declining pink shrimp landings and the die-off of Florida Bay seagrasses is being studied.



Fishery Ecology Branch

Fishery ecology research is directed toward a more complete understanding of the functional ecology of habitats such as seagrasses, salt marshes, mangroves, and coral reefs.

We are examining the linkages between these habitats and production of commercially important fishes, crabs, conch and shrimps. This information is used to identify coastal habitats that are essential for maintaining

productive fisheries so that these areas can be conserved and protected.

We are also conducting research on the ecological value of restored and created habitats and developing design criteria for restoring these habitats to maximize their value for fishery species.



Protected Species Branch

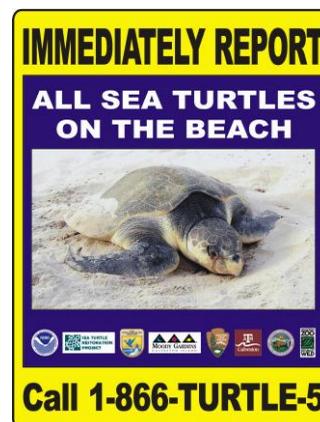
The Galveston Laboratory is perhaps best known to the public for its work on captive-rearing of sea turtles. Thousands of people visit our rearing and educational facilities each year. Loggerhead hatchlings obtained from Florida are captive-reared for two to three years, used in research, tagged, and then released into the Atlantic or Gulf of Mexico. From 1978 to 2014, 24,185 Kemp's ridleys and 4,500 loggerheads were reared, tagged and released.



Growth and migration studies of captive-reared turtles indicate that they adapt well to conditions in the wild and are found distributed throughout the natural range of the species. Tagged headstarted Kemp's ridleys are nesting on the Texas Gulf coast.

The laboratory is the sea turtle hospital for the upper Texas Gulf coast. Injured or sick sea turtles are treated, rehabilitated and then released back into the wild. In addition, the laboratory participates in NOAA's Sea Turtle Stranding and Salvage Network and Marine Mammal Stranding Network.

Laboratory scientists have tracked sea turtles using radio, sonic, and satellite transmitters in order to determine their movements, diving



patterns, distribution, habitat preferences, and behavior. Turtle Excluder Device (TED) and longline avoidance testing is done using turtles from the laboratory to develop new ways of protecting sea turtles in the wild.



Offshore Observer Programs

Galveston Laboratory observers monitor the explosive removal of non-producing oil and gas structures in the Gulf of Mexico in order to prevent injury to protected species such as sea turtles and marine mammals.



Fishery observers are also placed onboard commercial shrimp and reef fish vessels in the US Gulf of Mexico and southeastern Atlantic to document the take of non-target and protected species, including sea turtles, marine mammals, sawfish, and sea birds. Fishery observers also collect data on alternative fishing gear to minimize finfish bycatch and to reduce interactions with protected species.

